

## Anosognosia for Hemiplegia as a tripartite disconnection syndrome

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1    **Abstract**

2        The rare syndrome of Anosognosia for Hemiplegia (AHP) can provide unique insights into  
3    the neurocognitive processes of motor awareness. Yet, prior studies have only explored  
4    predominately discreet lesions. Using advanced structural neuroimaging methods in 174 patients  
5    with a right-hemisphere stroke, we were able to identify three neural networks that contribute to  
6    AHP, when disconnected: the (1) premotor loop (2) limbic system, and (3) ventral attention  
7    network. Our results suggest that human motor awareness is contingent on the joint contribution of  
8    these three systems.

9        Motor awareness allows individuals to have insight into their motor performance, a  
10      fundamental aspect of self-awareness. However, following damage to the right hemisphere, patients  
11      with left paralysis may show delusions of intact motor ability, or anosognosia for hemiplegia (AHP,  
12      1). Hence, studying AHP offers unique opportunities to explore the neurocognitive mechanisms of  
13      motor awareness.

14      While early studies regarded AHP as secondary to concomitant spatial deficits such as hemineglect  
15      2 caused by parietal lesions, more recent experimental and voxel-based, lesion-symptom mapping  
16      (VLSM) results suggest that AHP is an independent syndrome. These earlier studies address AHP  
17      as an impairment of action and body monitoring, with lesions to the lateral premotor cortex and the  
18      anterior insula (3,4), affecting patients' ability to detect discrepancies between feed-forward motor  
19      predictions and sensorimotor feedback. However, these hypotheses are insufficient to explain all the  
20      AHP symptoms, such as patients' inability to update their beliefs based on social feedback or more  
21      general difficulties experienced in their daily living (5,6). Indeed, others have suggested that AHP  
22      can be caused by a functional disconnection between regions processing top-down beliefs about the  
23      self and those processing bottom-up errors regarding the current state of the body (5,7).  
24      Nevertheless, to date the brain disconnection hypothesis could not be explored due to the relatively  
25      small sample size and the standard methodology of previous studies, which favours the implication  
26      of discreet lesion locations in the pathogenesis of AHP.

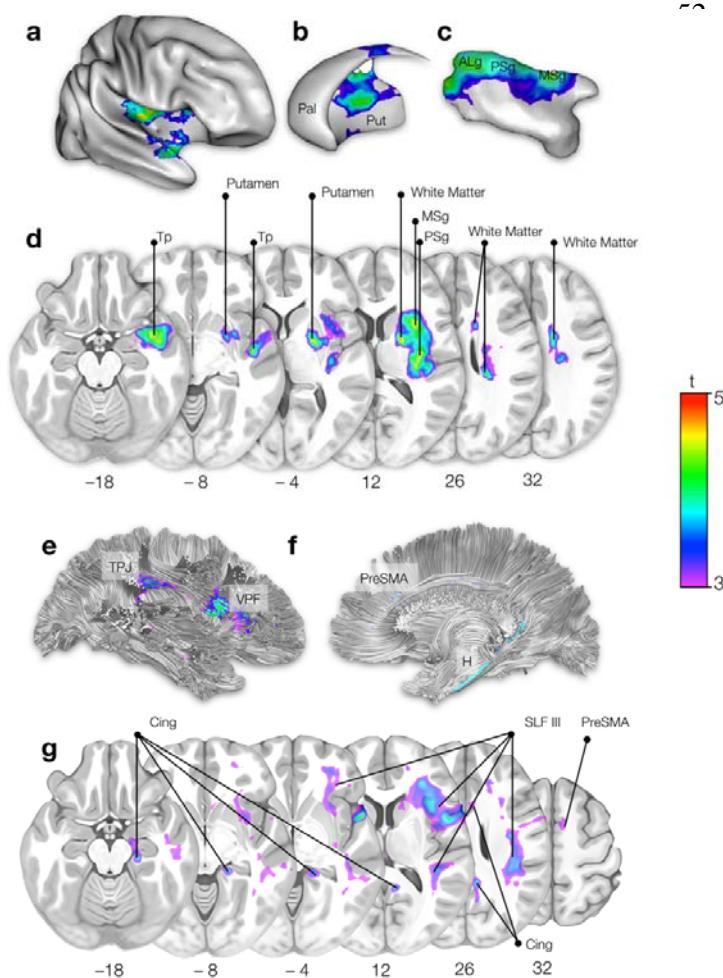
27      Here, to overcome this gap, we took advantage of (1) the largest cohort of AHP patients to date (N  
28      = 174; 95 AHP patients diagnosed by (8) and 79 hemiplegic controls) and (2) an advanced lesion  
29      analysis method (BCBtoolkit, 9). This method generates a probabilistic map of disconnections from  
30      each patient's brain lesion to identify the disconnections that are associated with given  
31      neuropsychological deficits at the group level. Previous use of this connectivity approach has  
32      already proven fruitful in the study of neuropsychological deficits (10–12).

33      We predicted that AHP would be associated not only with focal grey matter lesions, but also with  
34      long-range disconnections due to the white matter damage, in particular to tracts associated with  
35      sensorimotor monitoring and self-reflection. Specifically, we anticipated the possibility that motor  
36      awareness emerges from the integrated activation of separated networks (13,14), whose  
37      contributions feed into the multifaceted expression of the syndrome.

## 38 Results

39 To test these predictions, we first conducted anatomical investigations to identify lesion sites and  
40 created probability maps of white matter tracts' disconnection. These results were statistically  
41 analysed by means of regression analyses, to identify the contribution of grey and white matter  
42 structures in AHP, taking into account differences in age, lesion size, lesion onset-assessment  
43 interval and critical motor and neuropsychological deficits (i.e. covariates of non-interest).  
44 Considering our sample size and a power of 95%, t values above 2 correspond to a medium effect  
45 size (cohen d > 0.5) and t values above 3.6 correspond to a large effect size (cohen d > 0.8).

46 The regression computed on the lesion sites (**Figure 1a**) indicated the involvement of grey matter  
47 structures previously associated with AHP (15), such as the insula (anterior long gyrus,  $t = 4.89$ ;  $p$   
48 = 0.002), the temporal pole ( $t = 4.77$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ), and the striatum ( $t = 4.68$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ) as well as a  
49 very large involvement of white matter ( $t = 4.98$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ). The second regression on white matter  
50 maps of disconnection (**Figure 1b**) revealed a significant contribution of the cingulum ( $t = 3.85$ ;  $p =$   
51 0.008), the third branch of the superior longitudinal fasciculus (SLF III;  $t = 4.30$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ), and



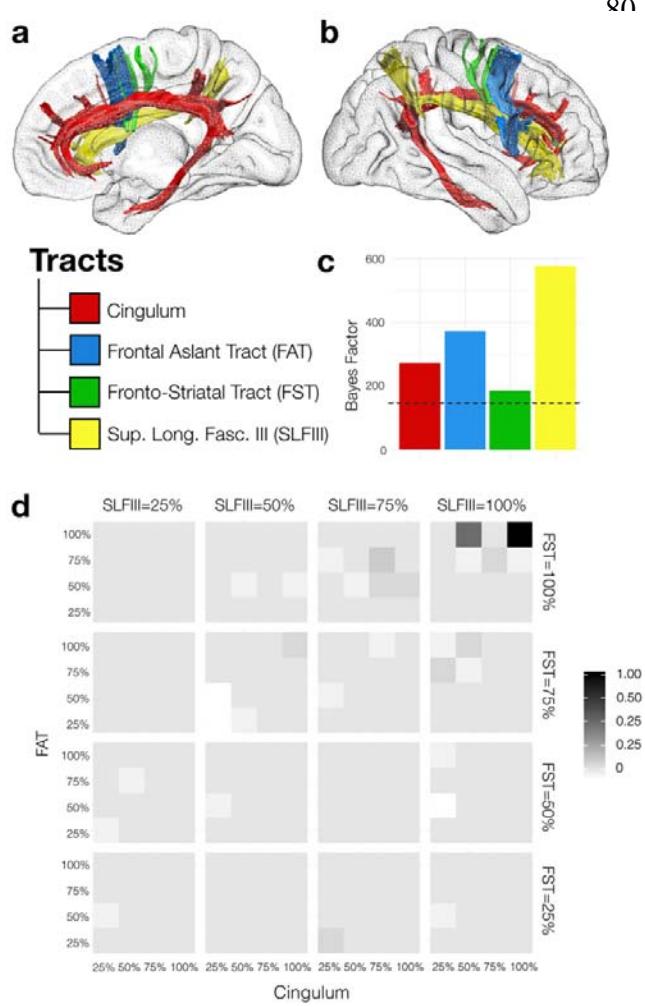
connections to the pre-supplementary motor area (preSMA;  $t = 3.37$ ;  $p = 0.013$ ), such as the frontal aslant and the fronto-striatal connections.

**Figure 1:** On the top half, statistical mapping of the lesioned areas in AHP. a) right hemisphere b) striatum c) insula d) axial sections. Pal: pallidum; put: putamen; ALg: anterior long gyrus; PSg: posterior short gyrus; MSg: middle short gyrus; Tp: temporal pole. On the bottom half, statistical mapping of the brain disconnections in AHP. e) right hemisphere lateral view; f) right hemisphere medial view; g) axial sections. TPJ: temporo-parietal junction; VPF: ventral prefrontal cortex; preSMA: pre-supplementary area; H: hippocampus; Cing: cingulum;

71 SLF III: third (ventral) branch of the superior longitudinal fasciculus; PreSMA: pre-supplementary  
72 motor area.

73 To test whether AHP emerges from the disconnection of each of these networks independently or  
74 together as a whole, we investigated the contribution pattern of the tracts' disconnection to AHP  
75 (individual or integrated), by means of Bayesian computation of generalised linear multilevel  
76 models. All of the possible binomial models ( $n=95$ ) were computed, starting from the null model  
77 (with only the covariates of non-interest) to the full model, with all the covariates of non-interest,  
78 the tracts, and all the interactions among them (16) (see Methods section). The results confirmed  
79 that the disconnection of each tract is critical to AHP (Cingulum,  $BF_{10} = 270.98$ ; FST,  $BF_{10} =$

80 180.48; FAT,  $BF_{10} = 367.61$ ; SLF III,  $BF_{10} = 571.49$ ). However, results indicate that the  
model that best fits with our data (99% of probability) includes the contribution of all  
the four tracts (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Motor awareness network a) right hemisphere medial view; b) right hemisphere lateral view c) Bayes Factors for the four models, each one representing the hypothesis that the presence of disconnection in a tract is necessary to explain AHP, against the null model (i.e. no disconnection is necessary to explain the presence of AHP). The dashed line represents  $BF_{10} = 150$ , the boundary suggested by (17) as the decision criteria for very strong support of hypotheses. The plot shows that each tract contributes to AHP symptoms. d) proportion of AHP over non-AHP patients, normalised to its maximum

100 (20). Darker the line, the greater the presence of AHP compared to non-AHP. The disconnections of  
101 tracts are divided into four categories: 25% - (0, 25]; 50%: (25, 50]; 75% - (50, 75] and 100% - (75,  
102 100]. In each subplot, the y-axis shows the percentage of FAT disconnection and the x-axis shows  
103 the percentage of Cingulum disconnection. The subplots are divided horizontally by the percentage

104 of SLF III disconnection, and vertically by the percentage of FST disconnection. In the all squares,  
105 binomial tests were computed to check if the number between AHP and non-AHP is different. The  
106 only significant difference ( $p=.01$ , the number of AHP is greater) is when the probability of  
107 disconnection for each tract is: SLFIII = 100%, FST = 100%, Cingulum = 100% and FAT = 100%  
108 (the black square on the extreme top-right).

109 These results, derived from the largest lesion mapping study on AHP to date, show that white  
110 matter disconnections in three networks contribute to AHP: (1) posterior parts of the limbic network  
111 (i.e. connections between the amygdala, the hippocampus and the cingulate gyrus); (2) the ventral  
112 attentional network (i.e. connections between temporo-parietal junction and ventral frontal cortex),  
113 through the SLF III; and (3) the premotor loop (i.e. connections between the striatum, the preSMA  
114 and the inferior frontal gyrus).

115 **Discussion**

116 Previous lesion mapping studies in AHP have highlighted the role of discrete cortical lesions in  
117 areas such as the lateral premotor cortex or the insula, and suggested corresponding theories of  
118 motor and body awareness (3,4 and 5,6, for a critical review). By contrast, our results suggest that  
119 AHP is a tripartite disconnection syndrome involving disruptions in networks that include, but also  
120 extend beyond, sensorimotor circuits. Correspondingly, motor awareness should be regarded as the  
121 collaborative effort (i.e. integration of a number of cognitive processes, rather than a purely motor  
122 monitoring function. Indeed, this interpretation is consistent with the delusional features of AHP  
123 (see 18) and a variety of experimental findings in AHP, such as the fact that awareness can be  
124 influenced by mood (19,20), or perspective-taking (21,22).

125 Specifically, the cingulum connects limbic system structures that have been previously associated  
126 with emotional and memory processing, and is part of the default mode network (23)—a pattern of  
127 intrinsic connectivity observed during self-referential, introspective states, including  
128 autobiographical retrieval, future imaging and mentalisation. These abilities relate to well-  
129 documented deficits in AHP patients' general awareness ("why are you in hospital?"), anticipatory  
130 awareness ("are you able to reach the table with your left hand?", 24) and mentalisation (25; "the  
131 doctors think there is some paralysis, do you agree?", 26).

132 The ventral attentional network (i.e. SLF III connections between temporo-parietal junction and  
133 ventral frontal cortex, as well as lesions in the insula and temporal pole) reorients attention towards  
134 relevant stimuli (27). This disconnection prevents the possibility to appreciate the bottom-up stimuli  
135 referring to one's own paralysis and (along with the limbic system) to update beliefs regarding the  
136 current body's condition ("I can walk as I have always done"; "I have just clapped my hands", 21).  
137 The insula is also crucial in these processes due to its important role in integrating external sensory  
138 information with internal emotional and bodily state signals (28).

139 Finally, the observed disconnections of the pre-motor network (pre-SMA, striatum and inferior  
140 frontal gyrus) suggest difficulties in monitoring motor signals and learning from action failures  
141 ("did you execute the action? Yes, I have").

142 Crucially, none of these networks (i.e. the limbic system, the ventral attentional network, and the  
143 premotor system) alone can fully explain AHP (**Figure 2c**). It thus appears that bottom up deficits  
144 in interoceptive and motor salience monitoring need to be combined with higher-order deficits,  
145 collectively leading to a multifaceted syndrome in which premorbid beliefs and emotions about the  
146 non-paralysed self dominates current cognition about the paralysed body.

147 These results open up interesting hypotheses on the hierarchical or parallel relations between the  
148 three networks, in terms of temporal activations (either serial, parallel or recurrent) that remain to  
149 be explored in future studies.

150 The main limitation of the study is related to manual lesion delineation and registration methods  
151 (29,30) and the sensitivity level of neuroimaging techniques that do not depict the full extent of  
152 damage produced by stroke lesions (31). However, these limitations mainly apply to small sample  
153 studies, while here, the large number of patients investigated reduces these risks.

154 In conclusion, on the basis of a large (N = 174) and advanced lesion-mapping study, we  
155 demonstrate a tripartite contribution of disconnections to the pre-motor network, the limbic system,  
156 and the ventral attentional network to motor unawareness. We thus suggest that motor awareness is  
157 not limited to sensorimotor attention and monitoring but also requires the joint contribution of  
158 higher-order cognitive components.

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167 **Materials and Methods**

168 *1. Design and Statistical Analysis*

169 The aim of the study was to explore the white matter disconnections involved in AHP. To this end,  
170 we investigated the neural systems that contribute to the symptoms of AHP. To the best of our  
171 knowledge, this approach has never been applied to the study of AHP and it can shed light on the  
172 theoretical and phenomenological complexity of the disease, by integrating and going beyond  
173 existing findings gained through classic lesion studies (3,4,15,18,32,33).

174 For this purpose, we collected neuroimaging and clinical data from a large sample of right  
175 hemisphere stroke patients. To compute lesion sites and map of disconnections that were strictly  
176 related to the AHP pathology, we compared our target group of AHP patients with a group of stroke  
177 patients with hemiplegia but without AHP. Patients' map of lesions and disconnections were  
178 statistically compared between the two groups and adjusted for covariates of non-interest. Variance  
179 related to patients' demographic variables (age and education level) was removed. As previous  
180 lesion studies (15,32) found some differences in neuronal correlates of AHP in acute and chronic  
181 stages, the interval between lesion onset and neuropsychological assessment was considered as a  
182 covariate of non-interest as well. We also included the lesions' size of our sample, taking into  
183 account the number of voxels of each lesion as a nuisance variable.

184 Finally, when computing the AHP map of lesions and disconnections we controlled for the clinical  
185 (onset-assessment interval, motor deficits) and neuropsychological (personal, external neglect and  
186 memory impairments) symptoms that are often associated with AHP but are related to different  
187 patterns of disconnection.

188 The tracts emerging from this analysis were further analysed by means of Bayesian models to  
189 confirm the individual involvement of each tract and test their joint contribution to AHP (see details  
190 below).

191 *2. Patients*

192 Data from 195 stroke patients with unilateral right hemisphere damage were collected from two  
193 collaborating centers based in Italy and the United Kingdom over a period of 10 years.

194 Patients' inclusion criteria were: (i) unilateral right hemisphere damage, secondary to a first-ever  
195 stroke, as confirmed by clinical neuroimaging; (ii) severe plegia of their contralateral upper limb  
196 (AHP left arm, MRC  $\leq 2$ ), as clinically assessed (MRC scale). Exclusion criteria were: (i) previous  
197 history of neurological or psychiatric illness; (ii) medication with severe cognitive or mood side-

198 effects; (iii) severe language, general cognitive impairment, or mood disturbance that precluded  
199 completion of the study assessments.

200 The MRI or CT neuroimaging data were available for 174 out of 195 patients. They were divided  
201 into two groups according to the presence/absence of AHP (see below for AHP assessment details),  
202 resulting in a group of 95 AHP patients and 79 non-AHP, hemiplegic control (HP) subjects. Among  
203 these, clinical and anatomical data of 40 AHP patients and 27 controls has been described in a  
204 previous study (15). Groups were balanced for demographic data (age, education, interval period  
205 between lesion and assessments) and lesion size. As the data were collected from different stroke  
206 recovery units, we took into account the neurological and neuropsychological tests that were most  
207 commonly administrated to all the patients across the different centers (**Table 1**).

208 All patients gave written, informed consent and the research was conducted in accordance with the  
209 guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and approved by the Local Ethical Committees of  
210 each center.

211 *3. Neurological and Neuropsychological Assessment*

212 Patients were identified as anosognosic or control according to their score in the Bisiach scale (8).  
213 This investigates the explicit form of awareness related to one's limb paralysis. During the scale  
214 administration, patients were required to verbally answer a 4-point interview about their current  
215 condition: a '0' score indicates a spared consciousness of the disease (= the disorder is  
216 spontaneously reported or mentioned by the patient following a general question about his/her  
217 complains), a '1' score is assigned when patients refer to their disability only after specific  
218 questions about the strength of their left limbs, while patients scoring '2' or '3' are considered  
219 anosognosic for their awareness of the disease emerging only after a demonstration through a  
220 routine technique of neurological examination (score 2) or not emerging at all (score 3).

221 Plegia of the contralesional upper limb was assessed through the Medical Research Council 5-point  
222 scale (34), ranging from 5 (normal functioning) to 0 (no movement).

223 Personal neglect was assessed by means of the 'Comb' test, from the 'Comb/Razor test' (35). We  
224 referred to each patient's score on the line cancellation subtest of the BIT as our measure of extra-  
225 personal neglect (Behavioral Inattention Test, 36). Finally, we used the digit/word span (37,38) to  
226 assess working memory. The 3-nearest neighbour computation replaced the missing data from the  
227 demographic and clinical variables (education: 4.9%; lesion-assessment interval: 0.05%; motricity  
228 index: 1.9%; personal neglect: 1.7%; extra-personal neglect: 2.5%; memory span: 6.2%).

229 In order to compare results expressed in different scoring ranges, all the scores from  
230 neuropsychological tests were transformed to z-scores, with higher scores corresponding to better  
231 performances.

232 *4. Lesions drawing*

233 Patients' neuroimaging data was acquired via Computerized Tomography (CT) and Magnetic  
234 Resonance (MRI) and lesions were segmented and co-registered using the manual procedure  
235 already described by Moro and colleagues (15).

236 The lesion drawing was performed blindly and independently by two of the authors (VM, SB), prior  
237 (blind) to the group classification. In cases of disagreement on a lesion drawing, a third anatomist's  
238 opinion was consulted (<10%).

239 Scans were registered on the ICBM152 template of the Montreal Neurological Institute, furnished  
240 with the MRICron software (ch2, <http://www.mccauslandcenter.sc.edu/mricro/mricron/>). First the  
241 standard template was rotated on the three plans (size: 181 x 217 x 181 mm, voxel resolution: 1  
242 mm<sup>2</sup>) in order to match the orientation of patient's MRI or CT scan. Lesions were outlined on the  
243 axial slices of the rotated template. The resulting lesion volumes were then rotated back into the  
244 canonical orientation, as to align the lesion volumes of each patient to the same stereotaxic space.  
245 Finally, in order to remove voxels of lesions outside the white and grey matter brain tissue, lesion  
246 volumes were filtered by means of custom masks based on the ICBM152 template.

247 *5. Disconnectome Maps*

248 Disconnectome maps were computed with the 'disconnectome map' tool of the BCBToolkit  
249 software (9). The first step of the procedure is the tracking of white matter fibres passing through  
250 each patient's lesion, by means of the registration of lesions on the diffusion weighted imaging  
251 dataset of 10 healthy controls (39). This produces a percentage overlap map that takes into account the  
252 inter-individual variability of tractography in healthy controls' dataset (40). Therefore, in the  
253 resulting disconnectome maps computed for each lesion, voxels show the probability of  
254 disconnection from 0 to 100% (11). These disconnection probabilities of each patient are then used  
255 for statistical analyses.

256 *6. Statistical analysis producing the sites of lesion and tract disconnection.*

257 We ran 2 separate regression analyses for lesion sites and tract disconnections, using the same  
258 procedure. We used the tool "randomize" (41), part of FSL package  
259 (<http://www.fmrib.ox.ac.uk/fsl/>, version 5.0), which performs nonparametric statistics on  
260 neuroimaging data. Lesion drawings or disconnectome maps were taken into account as dependent

261 variables within the general linear model implemented in ‘randomize’, in order to test the difference  
262 between the two groups in terms of disconnected brain regions. Demographic (age, education),  
263 clinical (lesion size, lesion onset- assessment interval, motor deficit) and neuropsychological  
264 (personal and extrapersonal neglect and memory impairment) data were considered in the model as  
265 covariates of non-interest. Threshold-Free Clusters Enhancement option was applied as to boost  
266 cluster-like structures of voxels and results that survived 5000 permutations testing were controlled  
267 for family-wise error rate ( $p>0.95$ ).

268 *7. Comparison of disconnection results with a brain atlas*

269 In order to confirm the matching between white matter disconnection emerging from regression and  
270 the anatomy of each single tract, we used an atlas of human brain connections (42).

271 Maps of this atlas were first thresholded at 90% (i.e. the tract position in at least 90% of healthy  
272 population) and binarized to produce masks representing the cingulum, the frontal aslant (FAT) and  
273 the fronto-striatal tracts (FST) as well as the third branch of the superior longitudinal fasciculus  
274 (SFL III).

275 Then, these masks were used to extract the probabilities of disconnection for each tract from each  
276 patient’s disconnectome map. These probabilities were used to investigate the contribution of each  
277 tract and their disconnection co-occurrence.

278 *8. Integration among tracts*

279 To confirm the individual involvement of each tract and test their joint contribution to AHP,  
280 statistical analyses were conducted by using Bayesian models (R software, 43; brms package, 44)  
281 and generalised linear multilevel models were computed (Stan, 45).

282 The presence of AHP (1) or its absence (0) was used as the dependent variable, while keeping  
283 demographic, clinical and neuropsychological variables as covariates of non-interest. As covariates  
284 of interest, we used the probability of each tract disconnection, ranged between 0 (=no lesion) to 1  
285 (=full lesion).

286 Then, we fitted 95 binomial models, starting from the null model (i.e., with only the covariates of  
287 non-interest) to the full model (i.e. with all the covariates of non-interest, the tracts, and all the  
288 interactions among them). The posterior samples were obtained by 4 chains, with 2500 burn-in and  
289 2500 sampling iterations, resulting in a total of 10000 iterations for each posterior sample.

290 As a first step we tested whether the single tracts can explain the presence of AHP better than the  
291 null model. For this, we used the Bayes Factor ( $BF_{10}$ , 17). A  $BF_{10}$  greater than 3 shows positive

292 support for the hypothesis that the tract is necessary, a  $BF_{10}$  greater than 150 shows very strong  
293 support (17).

294 Then, all the models were compared among them by means of their marginal likelihood, showing  
295 which is the winning model with a probability from 0 (=no representative) to 1 (=the best model).

296 *9. Data availability*

297 The raw data used for this research (lesions) as well as the dependent variable and covariates are  
298 provided in full as supplementary data.

299

	AHP (N=95)	HP (N=79)
<b>Demographic and clinical</b>		
Age (years)	68.48 ± 12.54	63,01 ± 13.49
Education (years)	9.46 ± 3.74	11 ± 3.77
Interval (days)	35.74 ± 40.58	44.42 ± 46.7
Lesion Size (voxels)	134327.74 ± 113196.17	113082.73 ± 120844.22
<b>Anosognosia</b>		
Bisiach score	2.46 ± 0.6	0 ± 0
<b>Personal neglect</b>		
Comb ( $\frac{\text{left-right strokes}}{\text{left+ambiguous+right strokes}}$ )	-0.3 ± 0.4	-0.06 ± 0.47
<b>Extra-personal neglect</b>		
Line cancellation (number of items cancelled)	19.26 ± 11.9	28.35 ± 10.77
<b>Memory Span</b>		
Digit/verbal span (number of items recalled)	5.65 ± 2.14	6.83 ± 2.46
<b>Motor index</b>		
MRC (UUL)	0.15 ± 0.42	0.6 ± 0.99

300 **Table 1.** For AHP and control groups, mean and (± standard deviation) of demographic and clinical  
301 variables, neurological and neuropsychological assessments are reported.

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